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The Old
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New Japan

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The Old and the New Japan

BY WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS, D.D.

PHYSICIANS tell us that the road from sickness to health is never a straight one. Convalescence means crookedness and uncertainty, ups and downs, with ebb and flow of the tides of life. So from pagan to Christian Japan we need not expect a slope of advance as perfect and lovely as the slopes of Fuji San—which all Japanese maidens in neck and shoulders strive to be like. The news items which reach us of advance and retreat, of revival and lassitude, of the success and failure of mission work in Japan, sometimes discourage and often confuse us. Yet, that on the whole there is steady gain, that, despite check and recession, there is sure rising of the ocean flood, seems certain from a contrast between Japan of twenty-five years ago and of 1899. Stretching the vista to 1850 the contrasts are startling.

The changes religiously and morally have been as profound as those which are social and political. The old world of feudalism has vanished.

The great forces that were gathering inwardly, as if a volcano were ready to blow off its rocky cap and spread flood and fire for the making of new soil, have prepared the way for the incoming of Christianity and for that renovation of individual and family life which ever inevitably follows in its train. We need not expect, in that land which has had over a thousand years of literature, philosophy and ethical training, a form of Christianity like that of Germany, France or England. Japan's twentieth-century Christianity will not be of the American type, yet it may be none the less real, none the less true to the type and spirit of Jesus.

We inherit Hebrew, Greek and Roman culture, fused in the crucible of Christianity and made a new unity, which is part of our very life, in thought, word, art, architecture, dress and social life. Why need the Japanese accept or assimilate all this? Why may not their own culture of Hindu, Chinese, far Oriental and native wisdom, when fused and purified in the fires of Christ's word and life, suffice for them, without regard to Greece, Rome or medieval Europe? Why, indeed, may we not expect a type of Christianity even superior to our own? Is Japan a Nazareth? Let it be so. We know, despite all prejudice, that a good thing *can* come out of Nazareth.

Let us see what has come already. I speak of what I know and testify to what I have seen. Until 1872 the religion of Jesus was publicly outlawed, and the government persecuted and imprisoned Christians. One could see outcasts, perhaps a half a million in number, as low as the pariahs of India (*Eta* and *hinin*), not reckoned or treated as human. Beggars abounded on the high roads. In some provinces gamblers, absolutely naked even in cold weather, could be seen. They were so debauched by their vice that before the traveler could hire them even as bearers, he must buy their food and have it cooked, watching them eat it to gain strength for the journey, lest they should gamble it, cooked or uncooked, away, as they had already gambled away, literally, every stitch of their clothing. Abominable and unspeakable diseases disfigured or weakened, not thousands, but millions of the people. Smallpox was so common that pink-capped babies and people with the open sores still on their faces walked freely abroad. Incredible obscenity of action was common in the public *matsuri* or processions to the temples. The public bath houses made no distinction between the sexes. The ordinary literature of romance, song, illustrated jest or storybook was filthy to the last degree. Again and again, as a student who wished to learn colloquial or even ordinary Japanese, have I

turned away in loathing from the disgustingly coarse and obscene burden that overweighted the native literature.

Of course there are plenty of rhapsodists over æsthetic Japan and philosophers out of sorts with Christian civilization who apologize for these "things Japanese," and explain them to their own satisfaction. No doubt there are many glass houses on our own continent, so we must throw some bonbons with the stones. Nevertheless, the Japanese man and woman of to-day are no longer "naked and not ashamed." They are out of Eden and out of their old life—so near in many respects to that of the animals. They have come to a new consciousness of duty, propriety and aspiration. They realize that the flaming swords of the cherubim guard all retreat into the past, and that they must go forward, even though it be with sweat of brow, in toil and struggle, from which surcease is far off.

To-day the signs are cheering. The very difficulties, when analyzed, show that those who are striving most strenuously to rear obstacles to Christianity and to bar it out, cower under the fear that its victory is not distant. It is not only that Japanese Chauvinism cannot in the long run stand against the ocean tide of cosmopolitanism, but it is the knowledge that "a greater than Solomon" or Confucius or Buddha is among them.

He has come to stay, and He will be wounded nowhere but in the house of his friends. His armor is impenetrable, and His might invincible against those who oppose him, by philosophy that is vain and by religion that is inadequate.

For what do we see? Gone are the obscene spectacles, processions, temple gifts and shrines which belong to the wreck of the ancient world. Exposure of the person brings shame, as in civilized lands. Popular literature, though still foul to an extent known only to those who are familiar with it, is vastly purer than of yore. The open licentiousness and debauchery of former days is vastly less. Though one divorce for every three marriages is still the rule, yet with restrictions removed that were in themselves immoral, that single statistical fact which in itself means unspeakable impurity—the standing still of population during a century or two—has given way to a steady and a normal increase, which means morality. Polygamy and the social crimes connected with it are no longer normal.

In order to discern and appreciate the coming of Christ's kingdom in Japan, we must sympathize with the Japanese and know their difficulties. Certainly the patriotic Christian in Japan has vexed questions to answer and tough problems to master. It will not do to tamper with the foundations of law and order. In the Japanese social vehicle, even of progress, the Em-

peror is the kingbolt. In theory he owns the whole soil. He is the sun in whose light all bask. From him comes all law. The very Constitution (of 1889) is his gift. His ministers govern, his soldiers and sailors act by the power which he confers. Everything that is good in Japan has come from his "divine ancestors."

How shall the patriot and Christian Japanese reconcile this ancient theory with the claims of Christianity, or even of God, with whom the Emperor's ancestors were, professedly at least, not acquainted? In Turkey the Sultan, as the head of the world of Islam, has a high officer called the Grand Mufti to explain or interpret the Koran in relation to the acts, events and public policy of the modern state. In Japan the language of theology is still gravely employed in state documents. It is not yet safe for a critical student to handle freely the sacred books and the long accepted systems of chronology, which carry the foundation of the Imperial line a thousand years before the dawn of history as known from records. We may make merry over "The Mikado" and enjoy the fun of Sullivan's music, amid the quaintness of ancient costumes on the operatic stage; but to the native of Japan it is a vital, a heart-searching and often heart-rending question how to act when the old and the new conflict.

Monogamy and the rule of one man to one wife in holy wedlock, securing the purity of the home, are with us fundamental ethics; but in Japan it is gravely argued that the Emperor must have a harem, else the Imperial line might, through a childless wife, come to an end. This would mean calamity, anarchy, and horrors unimaginable. Hence, say the orthodox after their sort, polygamy is a necessity in the palace. Yet while the Imperial example is what it is, there is slight hope that Japanese life will be fully purified. Again, to us, the idea that loyalty to the Emperor can in any way come into collision with loyalty to Christ seems to savour of the bathos of Chauvinism. Yet this is an argument used by many conservatives with terrific force against Christianity, which they brand as treason, calling Christians traitors. We can see how of late the Department of Education has been made the stronghold of anti-Christian reactionaries, who have tried to uproot everything that shows Christian leaf or bud, and to brand the Christian schools as nurseries of deadly hostility to the State. In a word, it seems to be the purpose of militant paganism in Japan to build a wall against what they know too well is an incoming and aggressive faith.

It is needless to say that, as the Chinese wall availed not to keep out the Tartars, and Mrs. Partington's broom failed to restrain the Atlantic Ocean,

so is it true that the Emperor's foolish advisers and silly worshipers are only making a Canute of him. Let us hope that he will have and display the wisdom of the royal Dane. Nevertheless, till he shows this wisdom and until Japanese Chauvinism passes away, the native Christian will have a hard time of it, and the love of many will wax cold.

What we have intimated ought to throw much light even on the Doshisha affair, especially when we remember, too, that the trustees of that institution were reared as Samurai, more familiar with swords than with ledgers, and better versed in etiquette and polite Chinese literature than in mercantile integrity and the idea of a sacred business trust.

To-day the problems of the Japanese Christian are mostly practical and largely ethical. They are the eradication of the two national diseases, lying and licentiousness, the securing of a day for rest and worship, the purifying of home, the creation of a Christian literature and Christian art, and the bringing in of the new world of Christian thought. The task of the theologians and teachers is not to unload upon their pupils and children our notions,—the output of our theological speculations and the products of our fancy, imagination, taste and national peculiarities, hardened into dogmas,—but to make Christ's teaching appear reasonable and lovely, to justify the

ways of God to the Japanese, to show the essential Christ in the unsatisfied aspirations of Japan's best men and women of the past. In a word, pure Christianity must appear to them not as an exotic, but as a plant of the Heavenly Father's own planting in Japan. The Japanese must see that they, equally with us, are the Heavenly Father's own children and objects of his loving care.

Yet no less important is the task of the Japanese Christian woman. Her work goes to the roots of the life of the family and the home. The nation is made up of homes. The unit of society in Japan is not the individual but the family. There is no simple word for "brother" or "sister" in the Japanese language, for the oldest son, even though an infant, is the head of the house. It is always the "older" brother and sister or the "younger" brother and sister. There are also various persons forming integral members of the family who would not be recognized as such in western homes, where the individual is the unit. With adoption so common one must beware of pitfalls everywhere, who would study individual "heredity" there.

/ To-day the Japanese maiden has different ideas and aspirations from her mother or grandmother. She lives in an age when the old stories of feudal-

ism and the heroic exploits of the Samurai men and women, once actual history, are to her what the tales of the medieval knights are to us—material for romance. Stronger in body and mind, with more independence and self-reliance, and a wonderful new world of opportunity before her, in which the avenues to new industries and professions are open, she is the heir of all the ages and the brightest hope of a Christian Japan.

Yet while her perspective is romantic, her outlook fascinating, and her future so bright,—from our point of view,—her difficulties and dangers are such as few of us can understand. Men are still selfish, as of old. They expect from the woman “the three obediences,” as child, wife, and mother. Her new ideas of chastity revolt against the old customs, which justify concubinage and licentiousness, and which will not only allow a father to sell his daughter to a life of shame to pay a debt, but which may even justify a student in getting an education abroad at the cost of his sister’s honor.

Yet surveying the past we have hope for the future, for God is omnipotent, the Gospel irresistible, and we and our fellow Japanese Christians are co-workers with Him. Chauvinism, national conceit, and insular barbarism, must melt before cosmopolitan civilization. The abominable beastliness which shelters itself under hoary and venerable tradition, the sin and

infirmity that hide behind the pretended weakness of women or under the age-old prerogative of men, the pride that arrays itself against the purity and the humility of the Son of Man, must all pass away. Christ will reign in the isles of The Land Where the Day Begins. Meanwhile let us pray, not only for the Japanese, but that our own spiritual pride and national conceit and inherited matters of taste and tradition, which we are apt to foist upon the pagans as vital Christianity, may give way to a clearer vision of the divine Christ and before a holier and less selfish zeal in his service.

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